

Dear Chairman Martin:

When I was a kid, my parents railed against monopolies and I know why: They are bad for creativity, bad for consumers, and bad for our economy. I hate what is happening to our publishing companies, newspapers and communications. I am writing to challenge the Comcast/Time Warner/Adelphia merger (FCC Docket No. 05-192) and the AT&T/BellSouth merger (FCC Docket No. 06-74).

Allowing the largest telecommunications company and the two largest cable companies in the United States to grow even larger serves no citizen. It only serves the companies and hurts the rest of us. It produces bad entertainment, bad service, bad art and high prices. What I now pay for these services is already outrageous.

Senator McCain told me prices would go down when we deregulated, but prices skyrocket now and product-quality has become a sham. Though we have more channels available than ever before--most of them are stupid and few of them worth watching--they are increasingly falling under the control of a handful of giant corporations. The cost of broadband service remains out of reach for me and I'm middle class. Working people don't have a chance and more mergers will make it worse--much worse. No competition.

Americans are hungry for more competition in services--when I was a kid, I learned that America was built on competition. What's happening? We're being made into slaves for a few giant corporations.

Allowing AT&T to combine with BellSouth will give the top three broadband providers control of over half of all broadband connections in the country. At the same time, the Time Warner/Comcast/Adelphia merger will give Comcast and Time Warner increased power over entire regions of the United States, allowing rates to rise even as the digital divide continues to grow.

The FCC should block these transactions or impose strict conditions to protect free speech and competition under its "public interest standard." If the FCC decides to allow either of these mergers, it should require the following conditions:

1. Subscribers must be able to choose from competitive Internet Service Providers ("open access"). The FCC should also ensure that these companies cannot discriminate against any Internet content or rival service and that every service will be treated exactly the same ("Network Neutrality").
2. Companies must be required to sell broadband access separate from video and telephone service, and at the same price ("naked broadband" or "unbundling").
3. Any subscriber must be able to connect any device to the network (such as a Wi-Fi router) that

does not harm the network.

4. Take steps to protect public access programming ("PEG"). Cable companies have become less responsive to the needs and requirements of communities. The quality of public accountability in local franchise agreements has declined, as big companies leverage their power to squeeze local governments. Likewise, telecommunications giants — like AT&T — are trying to eliminate the remaining vestiges of effective local oversight and control altogether.

5. Independent programmers must be able to reach subscribers. We are required to buy channels we don't want or need because providers of video service bundle them together and sometimes change them so as to push people into paying for even more channels in order to watch a favorite program-- this has and is happening.

6. Any company that owns both programming and video systems should be required to provide competitors with access to their regional sports and other programming needed to offer competing services, so consumers will still have real choices.

7. We must have the Fairness Doctrine again. A democracy must be informed on both sides of every issue and we need to reward investigative reporting. Our "information age" is a big laugh right now. We fall behind everyone—in information, education, tolerance, and good decision-making. Democracy will fail if we continue merging and dying. We are the most uninformed industrial nation on this earth.

In conclusion, I ask the FCC to consider the interests of the people like me who would pay the cable, telephone and broadband bills and watch the better programming if we could afford it, but all I have is the minimum cable TV and a telephone without any special gimmicks. I ONLY DREAM OF BROADBAND. Many people I know (teachers, writers, artists) have trouble affording broadband or cable TV. Please don't make it even harder for us. Give us a break. Don't allow Comcast, Time Warner and AT&T to raise prices or block local and independent voices.

Sincerely,
Elaine Thompson